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CLIC PAPERS

**US ARMED FORCES PUBLIC AFFAIRS
ROLES IN
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT**

**Army - Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia**

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US ARMED FORCES PUBLIC AFFAIRS ROLES
IN
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

by

ALEXANDER ANGELLE
Major(P), USA

Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia 23665-5556

May 1988

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iii

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PREFACE

Low-intensity conflict is a phenomenon that threatens US national interests throughout the world. Difficult to define, it nonetheless categorizes such acts as the killing of 241 Marines in Beirut, the deaths of many other Americans as a result of terrorist bombings and highjackings, and Marxist-Leninist insurgencies endangering friends, allies, and US strategic interests worldwide. The perpetrators and participants intend to disrupt and destroy democratic self-determination, free enterprise, and human rights, and install tyranny and totalitarianism globally. To avert and counter this, the US has adopted a multi-faceted policy which includes the prudent use of armed forces, principally for security assistance. However, public support--primarily from the US citizenry, but also from that of the assisted nations--is needed to ensure the policy's viability. United States armed forces public affairs practitioners can and should assume significant roles to help achieve that support.

This paper identifies and explains those roles. It demonstrates how public support can be earned for armed forces actions conducted in the context of overall US policy, and how that can logically contribute to support for, and effectiveness of, the national policy.

The author expresses appreciation to Col Lee Dixon, Lt Col Bill Furr, and Dr. Tom Crouch for their efforts on behalf of this paper.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major(P) Alexander Angelle is the Public Affairs Officer of the Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict. He was commissioned an Infantry officer in 1970 upon graduation from Bowling Green State University (B.S., Journalism). He has served in Infantry and Public Affairs positions at company, battalion, brigade, corps, and army levels. These have included Company Command tours in the US and the Republic of Korea, and assignments as Information Officer of a separate Infantry brigade in the US and Assistant Information Officer of a corps in the Federal Republic of Germany. He has also served as a detailed Inspector General for the US Army Recruiting Command. His schooling has included the Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, Defense Information School, US Army Command and General Staff College, and Armed Forces Staff College. He has written articles for a number of military and civilian publications, including Infantry magazine.

**US ARMED FORCES PUBLIC AFFAIRS ROLES
IN
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT**

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.

Abraham Lincoln, 1858

This is a people's war, and to win it the people should know as much about it as they can.

Elmer Davis, Director, Office of War Information, 1942

The balanced application of the various elements of national power is necessary to protect US interests in LIC. But in the final analysis, the tools we have at our disposal are of little use without the support of the American people, and their willingness to stay the course in what can be protracted struggles.

National Security Strategy of the United States, 1988¹

Introduction

These statements, dating from the Civil War era through today, indicate the importance of public support in the eyes of national leadership. The eras spanning these statements contrast sharply in the kinds of conflicts their leaders faced, but the respective recognition of the value of public support for national policy is apparent throughout the entire time span from the bitter division of the Civil War, to the global battle theaters of World War II, down to the phenomenon known as low-intensity conflict (LIC), currently the most common form of conflict worldwide. Low-intensity conflict is a term that evokes a wide assortment of images, perceptions, and definitions: "low level conflict," "dirty little conflicts," "violent peace," "brush fire wars," and "small wars," to name a few.

However, to many Americans, haunted by the turmoil, derisiveness, and bloodshed of the Vietnam War, the acronym LIC engenders distaste and distrust because it raises anew the specter of similar conflicts. In fact, a CBS-New York Times poll, reported during the "CBS Morning News" on 24 March 1988, indicated that a majority of those polled were more concerned about sending US troops into Central America (a region embroiled in LIC) than they were about a communist takeover of a nation in that region. Such thinking underscores the challenge of earning public support for US policy in LIC, especially when it may entail the employment of US armed forces.

Although it may be the most visible and contentious element of national power which can be implemented in pursuing US policy, use of the armed forces need not be perceived negatively or misunderstood. United States armed forces public affairs (PA) practitioners can help prevent this. Indeed, they should assume significant roles in earning public support for the employment of the armed forces as a necessary, prudent component of US policy in LIC. This paper will identify and explain those fundamental roles. It will also review salient points about LIC, emphasizing some of the relevant opportunities for PA specialists to contribute effectively to the achievement of US national security policy in LIC.

The LIC Phenomenon and US Policy

Low-intensity conflict is defined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as "political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low-intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments. Low-intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications."²

Low-intensity conflict should be thought of as an environment or continuum in which events (often interrelated) occur, rather than as a single incident or armed struggle. Therefore, neither the US nor any other state or organization can "win" in the sense of a military victory over an enemy who surrenders. Instead, US success in LIC will consist of achieving conditions that remove, or reduce to minimal levels, threats to national interests. Current US policy for LIC states, "the most appropriate application of US military power is usually indirect through security assistance--training, advisory help, logistics support, and the supply of essential military equipment."³

Public Affairs Applicability in LIC

To be successful in our democracy, US policy which employs military power needs an adequate constituency. Unfortunately, when US policy involves employment of military power in the Third World, that constituency often does not exist. This is primarily because, as the National Security Strategy of the United States points out, "Only a slight majority of Americans today believe that this country needs to play an active part in world affairs." Since LIC involves much activity outside US borders, the Strategy declares the need to build a "domestic constituency for America's foreign policy," and says that such agencies as "the Departments of State and Defense, Agency for International Development (AID), and US Information Agency (USIA), as well as several less

traditional participants, including the Departments of Commerce and Treasury, and the US Trade Representative (USTR)," should accomplish this essential task.⁴

In the Department of Defense (DOD), the PA elements are the most appropriate to lead this effort. Public affairs specialists, those military and civilian members of DOD who serve in PA positions ranging from public affairs officers to broadcast specialists, are prepared for this work by their training and experience. They can contribute to the public's understanding of US policy and strategy in LIC by articulating the actions of US armed forces within the context and goals of US foreign policy.

Public affairs is the element of the DOD responsible for informing the public. It is derived from the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), who is "the sole agent at the Seat of Government for the release of official DOD information for dissemination through any form of public information media," and is responsible to "ensure a free flow of news and information to the media, appropriate forums, and the American people, limited only by national security constraints and statutory mandates."⁵

The military departments have corresponding policies to carry this out. For example, the Department of the Army requires its agencies, as part of the "effort to tell the Army story," to "provide unclassified information about the Army and its activities to the public."⁶ Similarly, the Department of the Air Force, in its reflection of DOD policy, states its intention to "make available timely, accurate information about plans, budgets, and activities. This information is made available so that the public, the Congress, the press, radio, and television may assess and understand DOD programs."⁷

The military departments, and DOD as a whole, conduct external information, internal information, and community relations programs to fulfill PA policy. A review of those general programs is appropriate here, because of their utility in explaining LIC matters to the public.

External information, commonly called public information, is the category associated with the news media, and involves such functions as:

- o Releasing official information to the public about armed forces activities and operations
- o Answering news media inquiries
- o Providing news media access to armed forces installations, personnel, and operations

Internal information addresses the armed forces itself, including family members and civilian employees, with such products as:

- o Publications for military installations and organizations
- o Television and radio broadcasts for the military community
- o Personal presentations

Community relations efforts concentrate on the armed forces' relationship with the local citizens. It fosters understanding of, and support for, the military mission through programs which include:

- o Installation tours for the public or specific groups
- o Guest speeches by command representatives
- o Military ceremonies in the community

The News Media and Public Opinion

These programs, particularly external information, report about the armed forces to the public largely through the news media, which, as major sources of information about current events for the American public, have a major impact on public opinion. This result arises from the traditional journalistic functions of informing, entertaining, and influencing. According to one study, "Journalism history is the story of man's long struggle to communicate freely with his fellow men--to dig out and interpret news, and to offer intelligent opinion in the marketplace of ideas."⁸

It is from this marketplace the American public--and, because of electronic transmission of news reporting, foreign publics also--draws much of the information on which they base their opinions. Naturally, opinions are formed by an intermingling of an infinite number of such additional factors, as moral values, occupational ties, familial traditions, educational levels, religious views, and ethnic background. Public opinion is a complex concept that is difficult to measure, but its power is an irrefutable fact of life in every society. Currently, its power is tremendous in the US, particularly because of the responsiveness of the representative form of government and the many freedoms guaranteed by the US Constitution.

In short, because of the direct role US citizens enjoy in electing the US Congress, and that legislative body's power to declare war, and raise, fund, and regulate the armed forces, public opinion has an impact on the armed forces' missions and capabilities. Clearly, any policy involving armed forces employment without broad public approval is likely to perish under Congressional scrutiny. Since US policy in LIC must be long-term, the tie to public approval is therefore critical.

This tie, and its crucial relationship to long-term employment of the armed forces, was clearly reflected by the evolution of public support for military involvement in Vietnam. It ranged from wide initial support following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 to general disapproval at the time of the eventual withdrawal of all US forces in 1973. Opinion poll results at various stages of the war further demonstrated this metamorphosis. "One of the questions pollsters asked most frequently during the Vietnam War was this: 'In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the US made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?' In August 1965, as the United States was rapidly increasing its involvement in the war, 61 percent said, 'No' and 24 percent said, 'Yes.' For the next two years, between 48 and 59 percent continued to believe that the United States had not erred in entering the fighting in Vietnam. The Gallup poll in December 1967 was the final time that the respondents who answered 'not a mistake' were more numerous than the respondents who answered 'mistake,' but only by a margin of 46 to 45. By March 1968, in the wake of the Tet offensive, the percentage answering 'mistake' had grown to 49, while the percentage answering 'not a mistake' had dropped to 41. By August 1968 only 35 percent believed that American involvement in Vietnam had not been a mistake."⁹

Despite the fact support for the US role was visibly eroding by late 1967, many observers still consider news media coverage of the Tet Offensive to have been the catalyst sealing the issue. In a study of that event, journalist Peter Baestrup concluded, "the general effect of the news media's commentary coverage of Tet in February - March 1968 was a distortion of reality--through sins of omission and commission--on a scale that helped spur major repercussions in US domestic politics, if not in foreign policy. For a number of military men in Vietnam during the Tet offensive, it must have been ironic to win a military victory, have it reported by American journalists as a defeat, and have those reports accepted as fact by many Americans."¹⁰

Could a national program to build public understanding and support have averted or offset this final down-turn in public support of the war? One examination of America's involvement in Vietnam offered a consequence of not having such a program. "As former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Phil G. Goulding commented, 'In my four-year tour (July 1965-January 1969) there was not once a significant organized effort by the Executive Branch of the federal government to put across its side of a major policy issue or a major controversy to the American people. Not once was there a 'public affairs program'. . . worthy of the name'. "¹¹

As noted above, the National Security Strategy of the United States calls for a concerted effort by a number of departments and agencies to build a constituency for an active US role in world affairs. A unified approach, with clear objectives, can be

successful in this endeavor. Armed forces PA practitioners can assist by defining and explaining the armed forces' role in LIC in the context of US policy and undertaking actions to increase public awareness and understanding of armed forces missions and accomplishments. This task requires the full range of PA instruments discussed above.

Unique Public Affairs Aspects of LIC

The key difference between the role of PA in LIC and its role in mid- or high-intensity conflict lies in the armed forces' missions and the public's perception of the US policy that created those missions. General support of the public in a declared war, or in a commitment of US forces to protect obviously vital national interests, is a realistic assumption. In such cases, public support would probably accompany Congressional approval of US forces deployment.

However, there may be less understanding and support for US military participation in LIC, which, by its very nature, often lacks clear military objectives and definite starting and ending points. Thus, public support in LIC is tied to consensus for a comprehensive national policy which may include deploying armed forces for specific purposes to fulfill that policy. The public's perception of whether these deployments are in the national interest will directly affect the degree of support.

Therefore, armed forces PA actions should inform, as fully as possible, not only the US public, whose support underpins national policy, but also others interested or affected such as allies and the host government. Understanding and support for US assistance by citizens of the host country lends strong credibility to the mission. For example, most of the Honduran citizens' reactions, in reports read or seen by this writer during the period of Exercise Golden Pheasant (an emergency deployment readiness exercise in which an Infantry Brigade Task Force deployed to Honduras in March 1988) were positive regarding the presence of US armed forces. Moreover, aside from sporadic, small protests, the American public's reaction was also favorable. It is important here to inject a note of caution. The process of applying various PA tools must not employ propaganda or any manipulative practices. Rather, the goal of achieving a favorable public image of US military activities should grow through an accurate, credible process of communication leading to the goal of public acceptance of the military mission as being in the national interest.

Well-planned, high-quality public affairs products can enhance this process, because, as a respected public relations textbook asserts, "sound public relationships are built on good works and sound communication practices."¹² The "good works" accomplished in LIC may be as clear as providing dental care and immunizations to people in remote areas, or as complex,

"obscure," and difficult to gauge as training and assistance to a government fighting an insurgency.

Yet, they are all important in the composite responsibility to employ the armed forces effectively, judiciously, and economically to achieve US objectives. Armed forces PA professionals can assist in identifying those actions, programs, and projects to boost public understanding of their place in supporting US national interests.

Mission-Oriented Public Affairs Actions in LIC

Regardless of the role of US forces, the strong political and social nature of LIC requires PA programs with special emphasis on planning and coordination. The PA staff must maintain continuous coordination with other staff elements to monitor both domestic and military events involving US interests in LIC. Such actions will enhance the accuracy and timeliness of PA products.

Just what those products are, however, and what the nature of their implementation may be, will vary. A recent analysis has pointed out that, in LIC, "the specific mission determines what forces a commander needs (and also the situation in which the PA specialist will work). In most cases, security assistance personnel, special operations forces, and elements of combat support and combat service support units will play a major role in LIC."¹³ Public affairs practitioners will be operating as part of a joint (and often combined) organization supporting the operations plan (OPLAN). A Joint Information Bureau is typical of the public affairs structure that will be included.

Those tasks will certainly involve sustaining effective media relations work, where it will be important to provide public information releases explaining the reasons for US armed forces involvement. To the maximum extent feasible, these releases should include information about the legal basis, treaties or the request of the host government (as was the case with Exercise Golden Pheasant). They should also stress the relationship of the US military mission to US national security objectives.

Additionally, these releases should explain from the outset the postulated limits of US involvement. Detailed execution of PA actions will vary, depending upon the particular mission, the US-host country objectives, the operational security (OPSEC) constraints, and other factors peculiar to each situation.

When US armed forces are committed in a LIC, their actions are more clearly understood under several operational categories:

- o Insurgency/counterinsurgency
- o Combatting terrorism
- o Peacekeeping operations
- o Peacetime contingency operations

While these general categories are all parts of the broader LIC phenomenon, each has its own peculiar characteristics.¹⁴

Consequently, overlapping can occur. For example, PA specialists may find themselves supporting a peacekeeping force responding to a terrorist incident by means of such a peacetime contingency operation as a rescue-and-recovery operation. To understand the application of PA assets to assist in gaining and maintaining public support, it is important to know something about these categories. The following discussion briefly explains the basics of each general LIC category and points out PA actions relevant to each. This includes PA as an active part of training and assistance efforts.

Category I -- Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Many definitions for these terms are available. However, for this discussion, it is appropriate to start with the JCS versions. Insurgency is "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."¹⁵ Counterinsurgency is "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat subversive insurgency."¹⁶ Regardless of which side a person, group, or state may support, either explanation will suffice. The world community, however, has not been left with just these simple definitions. Instead, labels such as "liberation movement," "war of liberation," "people's war," "people's revolution," and many more have been transmitted to the world through various means.

These labels, as well as the actions and public expressions of various figures on both sides of such conflicts, have become a part of global thought. To increase public awareness of specific instances, points PA practitioners should know regarding insurgency and counterinsurgency are:

- o They are typically protracted conflicts, and therefore require a strategy suitable for the long haul.
- o Such a strategy is not so much to help a nation win battles against insurgent military forces as it is to assist their military to gain the time necessary for needed reforms to take root and flourish.
- o Unless the host government succeeds in eliminating the underlying causes of insurgency, any military successes in the field will prove fleeting.¹⁷

"Counterinsurgency is more a political and psychological struggle than a military contest. It is indeed a battle to 'win the hearts and minds' of the people. The lead agency in countering insurgencies is the host government."¹⁸ Public

affairs actions should both assist the host government to develop its information program and communicate with the host nation, American, and international publics through PA tools.

Public affairs efforts can synthesize and project the importance of various programs. For example, civil affairs operations, coordinated through the country team and conducted by such organizations as civil affairs, engineer, medical, logistics, and military and security police can help restore stability, contribute to national development, and promote indigenous support for the host government. Public affairs actions can ensure these helpful operations receive appropriate notice and convey the intent of the US in conducting them and of the host government in requesting them.

Because of their high visibility and tangible benefits to the indigenous population, these civil affairs operations are important means of highlighting the host government's sincerity and progressiveness. Public affairs practitioners should plan and execute programs conducted as part of a coordinated approach to foster public support by:

- o Providing wide media access to the areas affected by the assistance activities.
- o Explaining and underscoring that the host government is the controlling and willing sponsor of US assistance.
- o Emphasizing, through publicity and personal appearances, the supportive comments of key host-nation political, social, economic, and religious leaders.
- o Pointing out the destructive, derisive actions of insurgents, especially in the context of human rights, property, and cultural or religious matters.
- o Exposing the true political goals of the insurgents and explaining the linkage of those goals with an insurgency outcome harmful to the population.

In addition, PA specialists should cooperate with US security assistance organizations, mobile training teams, and special operations forces elements to establish the credibility of the host-government armed forces to meet potential threats and preclude the need for direct US combat intervention. Often, host-government military organizations require assistance and training in understanding the benefits of an effective public affairs program. United States military forces PA specialists can help in this effort.

This training should stress the value of public understanding and support for armed forces programs and actions. Timing and readiness are vital points to stress in this process. The host government's forces must understand the need to foresee vulnerabilities for truth manipulation by the insurgent and be able to negate them. For example, using the country's historical traditions and insurgency studies, the host country simulate typical acts in a training scenario. Using this scenario, the host government could prepare sample news releases and public announcements, which would be the basis for rapid responses to insurgent acts such as assassinations or destruction of key civil facilities. The training should emphasize that insurgents might blame such acts on rival groups or elements of the government.

The host government, perhaps with US assistance, could conduct this kind of training in a mobile facility in which host-country trainees could both receive instruction and practice the techniques. In some countries, the host government could reconstruct actual events to show how insurgents used disinformation to discredit the government. The host government also could use updates and situation reports to add realism and time sensitivity in releasing information. Other training tools could include arranging a "media day" in which armed forces representatives and the host-country news media prepare news releases about civil or armed forces projects to improve communities. They could also write suggested speeches for civic and military leaders to present in community gatherings to elicit local interest in the government's programs.

In addition, the host government should emphasize maximum use of the electronic media. Video and audio tools can be extremely effective in raising public awareness of the government's counterinsurgency policies and operations. The El Salvadoran government, for example, produced a video showing various aspects of El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) training and operations to demonstrate to the citizenry the ESAF's capability, and the government's determination, to combat the lingering insurgency.

While US armed forces might have some roles in support of resistance movements, they would probably only be tangentially involved, through such activities as intelligence and logistics. As a result, one would expect public affairs activities to be focused on government agencies other than the armed forces.

Category II -- Combatting Terrorism

Combatting terrorism is defined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as, "actions, including antiterrorism (defensive measures taken to reduce vulnerability to terrorist acts) and counterterrorism (offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism) taken to oppose terrorism throughout the entire threat spectrum."¹⁹ Terrorism is "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property for coercing or

intimidating governments or societies and often for achieving political, religious, or ideological objectives."²⁰ Terrorism is perhaps the best known and most graphic form of LIC. The terrorist-bomb killing of 241 Marines in Beirut in 1983, the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in June 1985, and bombings of the Rome and Vienna airports later that year are recent examples of terrorist acts which stunned and angered the world as they unfolded in daily newspaper accounts and hourly broadcasts through live, satellite transmissions. This summary portrays the danger of terrorism confronting the world.

Terrorism is a threat to US interests throughout the world. Terrorists may be sponsored by political groups or other entities in a nation. They may also be backed by elements supported externally or by insurgents employing terrorism as a catalyst to achieve their goals. Terrorism offers its perpetrators high-visibility and lucrative rewards with relatively little risk. Targets such as population centers, public transportation stations, industrial or military installations, and specific persons provide abundant opportunities for terrorists to get worldwide notice for their message and exaggerate their importance. To execute their actions, terrorists resort to many forms of violence, such as hostage taking, sabotage, assassination, threats, hoaxes, bombings, and torture.²¹

Public affairs actions in combatting terrorism should make it clear terrorists' victims most often have no role whatsoever in causing the alleged grievances of the terrorists. News media attention, especially that of television, is a primary goal of terrorists, who seek this exposure to gain the recognition they would otherwise probably lack. When the news media reports terrorist incidents, the terrorists will try to use these reports to gain attention and sympathy and forward their views.

Public affairs efforts should strive to educate everyone about the senseless destruction, human suffering, and death terrorism causes, and in doing so, make it clear that terrorists are criminals without justification for their acts. This is an important step in precluding or dissolving the arousal of sympathy, which, if it occurs, can encourage terrorism.

Massive negative public opinion about terrorists, such as that resulting from the PLO attack at the 1972 Olympics and the hijackings and bombings noted above, will likely result in negative news media coverage about terrorists and terrorism. In fact, two of the United States' major weekly news magazines (Newsweek, 1 July 1985, and Time, 14 April 1986) reacted to increasing terrorism by stepping out of a purely reportorial role and publishing detailed articles proposing various anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism measures.

It is desirable to promote public awareness of anti-terrorism to forestall casualties and property damage. Many public affairs

tools, including installation newspapers, pamphlets, guest speakers, first-person accounts, and public displays of anti-terrorism measures are useful to:

- o Increase public awareness of terrorist threats
- o Promote public indignation of terrorism
- o Justify strong counter-terrorism measures
- o Increase anxiety in the minds of terrorists
- o Communicate self-protection steps

Category III -- Peacekeeping Operations

Peacekeeping operations comprise various military endeavors supporting diplomatic attempts to achieve, restore, or maintain peace in an area of actual or possible conflict. These operations focus on constrained force and are conducted only after the opposing parties agree, through diplomatic negotiations, to have such forces present. The parties also must agree on the specific size and type of forces and the character of the operations. Participating forces may face uncertainties inherent in such an environment. As a result, they may be forced to respond to terrorism or armed conflict arising from the tension and violence in the locale.²²

Because of the hostile situations which may accompany a peacekeeping operation, peacekeeping forces must establish their impartiality to ensure their credibility and viability.²³ The PA principal, such as the PAO, can help emphasize that ideal.

To render effective assistance, PA actions in peacekeeping operations should focus on the multi-lateral nature and importance of the diplomatic process in resolving the conflict and should emphasize the mandate and support of all belligerents. Such information can enhance understanding of the legitimacy of US involvement and assist in achieving public support for the operation. Public affairs elements should implement the joint or combined PA policy guidance from DOD and the respective command elements with all possible speed. If action in this regard is not immediately forthcoming, the disputes and hostilities which peacekeeping operations are trying to abate can erupt violently and stifle the operation. Public affairs planning should aim the public affairs process at:

- o Informing all parties that the participating parties have the military capabilities and political will to succeed.
- o Communicating a sense of the constraints governing use of force in the operation.
- o Explaining to the affected civilian population how the operation's success will benefit the community.

Category IV -- Peacetime Contingency Operations

Peacetime contingency operations are military activities which usually deploy forces quickly and employ them for a brief period in a situation short of sustained combat. These operations are distinguished by their concentration on finite problems. They typically use tailored forces in a structure that is joint or combined (or both). Peacetime contingency operations may be used, for example, when diplomatic efforts do not achieve solutions or settlements deemed vital to US interests in a time-sensitive predicament, or when a sudden danger to national interests compels immediate reaction. Likewise, armed forces might be needed when diplomacy is unsuccessful in ensuring protection of US interests, or the welfare of US citizens.²⁴ Peacetime contingency operations have a variety of labels, such as humanitarian assistance, noncombatant evacuation, show of force, raid, security assistance surge, and rescue and recovery operation.²⁵

Because they involve direct application of US forces, peacetime contingency operations can have a significant impact on public opinion. In doing so, they may favorably or unfavorably affect the attitudes and support of domestic and foreign publics. Attacks against terrorists' sanctuaries are good examples of these kinds of operations. They demonstrate US resolve to deal with terrorists' actions.

To facilitate their opportunity to spell out US armed forces missions and activities, PA staff principals must be involved in the earliest planning stages of these operations. Background information about the affected area is especially important because it will be needed in describing the population, history, and logistical aspects involved in the operation.

To illustrate, consider some aspects of these operations. A noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) is used to move civilian noncombatants from places in a foreign (host) nation. These noncombatants are usually endangered US citizens but could include certain host-nation natives or third-country nationals. This kind of operation calls for forces to rapidly enter the country, temporarily occupy an objective, and conduct a planned withdrawal. Forces are limited to the size and composition needed to protect the evacuees and the force itself.²⁶

In a different situation, the US could provide accelerated security assistance to a friend or ally facing an imminent threat. This operation would normally be logistically oriented. Consequently, airlift and sealift would be of major importance. The ultimate needs would be determined by the time constraints and movement requirements involved. The US assistance to Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur war exemplifies accelerated security assistance supporting national objectives.²⁷

Any such operation will cause rapid and widespread news media coverage. Advance PA planning must therefore stress such considerations as:

- o Explaining the operation in terms of US interests
- o Legal basis for US actions
- o Limits and objectives of US actions
- o Internal information products similar to those above

A show of force to demonstrate US national strength and intention or a rescue-and-recovery operation to demonstrate US resolve to protect its citizens, represent examples of peacetime contingency operations which can generate public support if clearly and completely explained through PA tools. Operation Urgent Fury in October 1983 was a rescue-and-recovery operation, while the March 1988 Exercise Golden Pheasant, involving mainly an Infantry Brigade Task Force, was designated a show of support for the Honduran government. However, the latter had the effect of a show of force, because Sandinista troops, which had crossed into Honduras to attack Contra bases, left Honduras a few days after US troops arrived in Honduras to start training.

Balancing OPSEC and Public Information

Operation Urgent Fury and Exercise Golden Pheasant also illustrate a marked contrast in the relationship between DOD and the news media regarding the methods used to provide the news media a fair opportunity to cover activities of the US armed forces while preserving OPSEC to protect the integrity of the operation. The news media were excluded in the initial stage of Operation Urgent Fury, because of the Joint Task Force Commander's decision that their presence would destroy OPSEC if early news coverage were possible. After the operation, President Reagan's approval rating, according to one survey, jumped to its highest level in two years,²⁸ and 90 percent of Grenadians surveyed by CBS approved the US action.²⁹ However, many members of the news media raised a furor over the issue of open media access to a military operation from the outset. As a result, the then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John W. Vessey, Jr., established a Media-Military Relations Panel, a body containing professional journalists and DOD members, to examine the issue of how to keep the public informed about armed forces operations without compromising OPSEC or endangering the lives of the members of the armed forces.

Chaired by Major General (retired) Winant Sidle, a former Chief of Information of the US Army, the "Sidle Panel" made a number of specific recommendations. One of which resulted in the formation of a national media pool to ensure access to a representative number of print and electronic media members at the outset of an operation. It also established procedures in the Joint Operation Planning System for PA planning and guidance to start in the warning-order stage of the planning process.

These steps were important in energizing the armed forces to recognize PA as a vital element in the planning cycle. They were also instrumental in sensitizing the news media concerning basic aspects of planning and conducting combat operations. The media pool concept has been practiced several times, with increasing success. During the first attempt in 1985, reporters were flown to Honduras, and the fact that the pool had been called out was disclosed even before reporters left Washington.³⁰ The latest examples involved actual operations, specifically, the tanker escort mission in the Persian Gulf and Exercise Golden Pheasant in Honduras. During the latter occasion, the media pool provided on-the-scene coverage at the loading areas at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Fort Ord, California, and at the landing and training sites in Honduras.

To be sure, there have been grumblings about the media pool, such as this one from the Persian Gulf: "While US Navy destroyers shelled two Iranian oil platforms yesterday in the Persian Gulf, members of a news pool organized by the Pentagon sat in a hotel with nothing to do. . . . After US helicopters sank an Iranian speedboat and disabled two in the northern gulf on October 1987, the journalists were denied direct access either to the scene or to information."³¹

Other assessments have been more upbeat and reflected respect for the OPSEC concern: "The media-Pentagon antagonism of four years ago has diffused significantly, as Pentagon spokesmen have praised the accuracy and 'positive' nature of pool reports. Pool members also successfully maintained secrecy."³²

Finally, Exercise Golden Pheasant seems to have shown an improvement thus far in answering news media demands for access to US military operations without compromising OPSEC. One reporter who participated said, "A 10-member national press pool activated from Washington, DC, arrived on the emergency 'training' exercise . . . the military press pool worked well, allowing reporters to land with the US troops and record the 'impressive' parachute landing March 18 of troops and equipment." The reporter also noted an encouraging bit of cooperation in that, "there was no censorship, but officers noticed mistakes and allowed reporters to correct them before telecopying them to the Pentagon for distribution."³³ Moreover, this is the mechanism which is in place and will likely appear often in the foreseeable future. The PA staff principal and other practitioners must make it work by being knowledgeable and adept in planning; they must understand the entire process from the creation of a complete Public Affairs Annex for the OPLAN to the identification of transmission facilities for news media representatives and the definition of OPSEC limits. For their part, the news media will undoubtedly pursue all the opportunities that are available to them to record US armed forces operations in LIC: such is the nature of their profession. However, a cooperative working relationship, promoted by PA representatives and news media members alike, would aid both entities in their efforts.

Conclusion

In 1985, the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force, a group which included journalists (some of whom are former military officers), educators, a lawyer, and a former Chief of Naval Operations, studied the issue of the military and the media and asserted, ". . . our free press, when it accompanies the nation's soldiers into battle, performs a unique role. It serves as an eyewitness; it forges a bond between the citizen and the soldier; and, at its best, it strives to avoid manipulation either by officials or by critics of the government through accurate, independent reporting. It also provides one of the checks and balances that sustains the confidence of the American people in their political system and armed forces."³⁴

Armed forces PA specialists connect the American people to their armed forces through the free press. To win public support for the armed forces missions needed to achieve US policy objectives in LIC, skilled, dedicated PA professionals must do their best in what former Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger called "the proper, unashamed and unremitting willingness to make our case at the bar of public opinion abroad and at home."³⁵

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